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# The construction of 'geopolitical spaces' in Russian foreign policy discourse before and after the Ukraine crisis

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## ABSTRACT

Focusing on discourses by the ruling elite, this article examines the construction of 'geopolitical spaces' in Russian foreign policy. Based on a critical geopolitical analysis, suggesting that territory, space and geographies are being actively (re)formulated by those in power, this article analyzes how policy-makers define and articulate the importance of a particular geographical region for their foreign policy. It analyzes how the three 'geopolitical spaces' – Eurasia, the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific – are defined by Russia's political leaders and how each space fulfils a particular function for the pursuit of Russian interests abroad. In a second part, this article takes into account the events in and around Ukraine starting in late 2013 and analyzes how Russia's discourse toward the traditional 'geopolitical spaces' changed as a result. It is argued, that while Russia previously strived for membership in each of the three 'geopolitical spaces', the Ukraine crisis and its impact on Moscow's relation with the West led to a reorientation of Russia's geopolitical vision toward the East and most importantly toward Eurasia. The establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union was instrumental for the promotion of a new vision of wider Eurasian integration.

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## 1. Introduction

This article focuses on the importance of 'space' and geopolitical arguments in the formulation of a country's foreign policy. It is embedded in wider debates around the importance of geography and space in international relations (Starr, 2013a). The concentration lies on foreign policy as a discursive practice, meaning that each country defines and constructs 'geopolitical spaces' which are crucial in the pursuit of its national interests. Based on a critical geopolitical analysis, suggesting that territory, space and geographies are being actively (re)formulated by those in power, this article analyzes how policy-makers define and

articulate the importance of a particular geographical region for their foreign policy. At the center of this article is an analysis of Russian foreign policy discourse allowing us to depict the principal geopolitical regions with which Russia interacts as well as their respective importance for Moscow.

This article examines the construction of 'geopolitical spaces' in Russian foreign policy since Vladimir Putin became President in 2000. It analyzes the way in which the three principal 'geopolitical spaces' in Russian foreign policy – Eurasia, the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific – are defined by the political leadership in Moscow.<sup>1</sup> In a second step, this article analyzes how this traditional geopolitical imagination changed in reaction to the events in Ukraine starting in late 2013, and with the implementation of the Eurasian

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<sup>1</sup> See also a similar study, with a different sample and methodology, by Ambrosio and Vandrovec (2013).

(Economic) Union. It is argued that the crisis in Ukraine and the subsequent deterioration of relations between Russia and the West left a decisive imprint on the way in which the geopolitical imagination of Russia's leaders evolved.

Russia's political elite considers the country to be a member of and important actor in each of the three geopolitical spaces. For Moscow, 'membership' in each of these regions is a condition for maintaining its status as a great power in the international system. With this in mind, foreign policy discourses are a flexible means of readjusting Russia's geopolitical vision in accordance with the general shifts and new tendencies in global affairs. Discourses precisely fulfill the function to appropriate the sovereignty over matters of definition of particular spaces and places and to frame Russian membership in each of these geopolitical spaces.

In a first step, the article briefly presents the advantages offered by critical geopolitics in analyzing foreign policy and especially discourses by policy-makers. After a brief background discussion on Russian foreign policy, the article will move to the core of the analysis by presenting the political elite's geopolitical discourse on Eurasia, the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific region. Thereafter, this article reflects upon the implications of the Ukraine Crisis for Russia's geopolitical imagination and draws preliminary conclusions on the current and future orientation of Russian foreign policy.

## 2. Critical geopolitics and foreign policy

This article focuses on the geopolitical vision of Russia's political elite and the discourses of these "intellectuals of statecraft" (O Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). The subsequent analysis is based on speeches and interviews by prominent political leaders with a responsibility for external affairs, as well as the three foreign policy concepts (FPC) of 2000, 2008 and 2013.<sup>2</sup> The collected material has been analyzed qualitatively rather than quantitatively in the sense that the article works with direct quotes from speeches and documents.

The analysis herein focuses on the construction of 'geopolitical spaces'. While acknowledging given geographical and territorial realities, this article argues that with regard to foreign policy practice, personal conceptions and interpretations of these realities play a crucial role. Hence, "geography is 'dynamic' in that the meaning of space, distance, territory, and borders can change in the perceptions of peoples and foreign policy-making elites" (Starr, 2013b, p. 439; see also Agnew, 2003, pp. 2–3). This is particularly true in times of globalization, in which we see an increasing diffusion of power across various scales and places.

Critical geopolitics focuses on how "global space is incessantly reimagined and rewritten by centers of power and authority" (O Tuathail, 1996, p. 249; see also Dalby, 1991; Dodds, 2001; Kuus, 2010) and is interested in how geopolitical analysis functions as an aide in the conduct of a state's foreign policy. As Dodds argues, "the practice of foreign policy

is inherently geopolitical because it involves the construction of meaning and values of spaces and places" (Dodds, 1993, p. 71). It would be wrong, however, to assume that foreign policy is a stable practice. Instead, it continuously reproduces and reformulates state identity in response to changed perceptions and realities in the global system. In so doing, foreign policy becomes a state practice that aims at naming places in order to confer meaning upon them (Agnew, 2003; Campbell, 1992; Dijkink, 1996, pp. 11–15; O Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). As such, discourses are understood here as important parts of policy-making practices through which a country's interests and policies are defined and justified, both internally and externally (Bassin, 2004, 621; Mamadouh & Dijkink, 2006; Müller, 2008; O Tuathail, 2002, pp. 605–607; O Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, pp. 192–193). As such, discourses are both a tool for policy, in that they are programmatic and present a vision, as well as a cause of policy, by being reactive and trying to make sense of political actions. Since "geopolitical reasoning operates through the active simplification of the complex reality of places in favor of controllable geopolitical abstractions" (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, pp. 48–49), analyzing the construction of the Eurasia, Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific 'geopolitical spaces' in the discursive practices of Russia's leaders sheds light on Russia's official geopolitical vision of its place in the international system.

## 3. The foundations of Russian foreign policy

This study is grounded in the tradition of practical geopolitics, which focuses on the political elite, and thus omits a range of other actors that equally influence Russia's geopolitical imagination. There is already a wide variety of scholarship focusing for instance on the writings of prominent academics (Tsygankov, 2003) or the examination of geopolitical perceptions of ordinary Russians and popular ideas about Russia's place in the world (O'Loughlin, O'Tuathail, & Kolossov, 2006; O'Loughlin & Talbot, 2005). In addition to these studies, especially the work of Ted Hopf (2002) and Anne Clunan (2009) is particularly instructive in its engagement with the role of identity in Russian foreign policy.

The starting point for this study is Vladimir Putin's accession to the Russian presidency in 2000. The following section therefore provides some historical background and a brief overview of the debates related to Russian identity and foreign policy in the 1990s.

The debate about the reorientation of Russian foreign policy already started under Mikhail Gorbachev and his policy of 'New Thinking' (Legvold, 1989; Mandelbaum, 1998, pp. 4–6); however, it reached its peak in the early 1990s during Boris Yeltsin's presidency. This was due to the fact that, as Ted Hopf argues, "Russia found itself between two different modern identities – that of the Soviet past and that of the western present" (Hopf, 2002, pp. 155–156). This opened the floor to debate among the many political factions about the meaning of the Russian nation and its place in the world. Andrei Tsygankov identified three schools of thought: Westernist, Statist and Civilizationist (Tsygankov, 2006, pp. 4–7; see also Tsygankov, 2005a). The Westernists emphasized "Russia's similarity with the West and viewed the West as the most viable and progressive civilization in

<sup>2</sup> The transcripts of the speeches have been obtained in English translation, in most cases directly from the websites of the President of Russia and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The sample includes speeches by Igor Ivanov, Sergey Ivanov, Sergey Lavrov, Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin.

the world” (Tsygankov, 2006, p. 4). The Statists stressed “the state’s ability to govern and preserve the social and political order” implying that Russia has its proper way of developing (Tsygankov, 2006, p. 5). Finally, the Civilizationists considered Russia to have its own Eurasianist civilization opposed to that of the West and “the Western system of values, insisting on the cultural superiority of Russia and Russia-centered civilization” (Tsygankov, 2006, p. 7). Throughout the 1990s, these discourses were in competition with each other and each took center stage at a different moment. The accession of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in 2000 led to the implementation of a new approach in Russian foreign policy with the aim to restore Russia’s ‘place’ in global affairs (Rumer, 2007, pp. 7–8). With Vladimir Putin, Russia once again had a strong leader, capable of defining and implementing a clear foreign policy vision and strategy.

### 3.1. Russia as a great power

One of the principal goals of the Russian leadership is to establish their country among the world’s great powers (Mankoff, 2009; Tsygankov, 2005b), according to the status it enjoyed during the Cold War period. This historical identity is constructed on the image of Russia as a strong and powerful country, a full member of the international community of states and an influential force in global developments. Vladimir Putin, in his 2003 address to the Federal Assembly, claimed that “Russia’s historic fate over these thousand and more years” was to maintain “a state spread over such a vast territory and preserving a unique community of peoples while keeping up a strong presence on the international stage” (Putin, 2003). Permeating this statement is the will to uphold a position that is deemed worthy of a country the size and historical stature of Russia. The practical implication being that Moscow should conduct a foreign policy according to this role which means to behave like an independent pole and one of the principal actors in global politics. According to Putin, this role has been conferred upon Russia by its history and is a defining feature of the country:

It is hardly necessary to incite us to [play an increasingly active role in world affairs]. Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy. (Putin, 2007)

This statement leaves no doubt as to Russia’s ambition to belong to the small number of great powers which dominates the international system. One of the main objectives of Russian foreign policy, according to the FPC is to “achieve firm and prestigious positions in the world community, most fully consistent with interests of the Russian Federation as a great power” (Russian Federation, 2000). The FPC of 2013 reiterates this by stating that Russia aims at “securing its high standing in the international community as one of the influential and competitive poles in the modern world” (Russian Federation, 2013).

The preoccupation with status and the role which has been conferred upon Russia by history is characteristic of Russian foreign policy. Post-Soviet Russian foreign policy was

built on ideas of status rather than on an objective assessment of Russia’s material conditions and rational interests (Clunan, 2009, pp. 206–207). The word used in Russia to describe this phenomenon is *derzhavnost*, “referring to a preoccupation with great power status regardless of whether Russia has the military and economic wherewithal” (Welch Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, pp. 78–79). Russia’s quest for great power status is thus based on “an emotion, it is a craving for a status that most Russians strongly believe is theirs by right, by virtue of the enormous size of the country, its resources, its history” (Smith, 2012, p. 40). Having lost its status and hegemonic position in global politics after the dissolution of the USSR, Russia’s political elite aimed at re-establishing a similar status as soon as it consolidated Russian power in the 2000s. In addition to losing its status, Russia suffered a decisive loss of territory – or rather territory controlled by Moscow. As a result, Russia had to formulate a new geopolitical identity which differed from its previous existence as center of the Soviet Union. The way in which the principal regions of interaction for Russian foreign policy are framed is the topic of the next section.

## 4. Geopolitical spaces in Russian foreign policy discourse

The principal ‘geopolitical spaces’ according to Russia’s foreign policy discourse are Eurasia, the Euro-Atlantic region (EAR) and the Asia-Pacific region (APR). These regions are contiguous to Russia, and Russia, merely by its size and geographical location is a part of all these regions. Likewise, these regions represent both ‘the old’ and ‘the new’ in the sense that the Euro-Atlantic traditionally occupied the center stage of international politics, while recent years have led to a gradual shift to the East and the Asia-Pacific in particular.

### 4.1. Eurasia

Among the three geopolitical spaces analyzed in this article, the region of Eurasia is the most contested in terms of its definition and geographical spread. However, the undisputed factor in definitions of Eurasia is Russia’s centrality. For instance, the official FPCs from 2000 and 2008 both refer to Russia as the “largest Eurasian power” (Russian Federation, 2000, 2008). Nevertheless, there is no explanation or definition of which territorial area exactly corresponds to Eurasia. A hint as to the logic behind the definition of Russia as a Eurasian power is given in a speech by former Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov:

Composition of its population, spirit, culture and prevailing religions make Russia a European country. But two thirds of its territory and the main part of economic potential are situated in Asia. We base our analysis on the postulate of Eurasian location of Russia, its role of a natural bridge between Europe and Asia, between two civilizations, the role Russia has been playing for more than one century. (Ivanov, 2001)

This statement illustrates the complexity behind the construction of Russia’s geopolitical identity with regard to Eurasia. There are different elements, ranging from geographical to economic as well as from civilizational to

historical factors. Two underlying interlinked themes are recurrent in this construction of Eurasia and Russia's place in it: Russia's centrality and the historical argument, namely that Russia's expansion over the last four centuries principally took place across the Eurasian landmass. Hence, the metaphor of the bridge between the civilizations to the East and West once again serves as a reminder that Russia is at the center of this Eurasian space. At the same time, the historical reference to the fact that Russia played this role and occupied this space for a long time further helps to cement this image.

The self-positioning of Russia at the center of Eurasia by its elite lays the foundation for the policy in this space. As Vladimir Putin asserted in his 2005 presidential address to the Russian Federal Assembly, "Russia should continue its civilizing mission on the Eurasian continent. This mission consists in ensuring that democratic values, combined with national interests, enrich and strengthen our historic community" (Putin, 2005). The historical argument in Russia's construction of the geopolitical space of Eurasia is crucial because it ties Russia to other countries that share the same historical experience. In practical terms, this then provides Russia with a certain legitimacy for pursuing its foreign policy interests in the region. This "historic community" in Eurasia directly refers to present-day regional groupings and relationships with countries in Russia's neighborhood. The fellow former Soviet republics, most of which are re-grouped in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are thus a central component of the Eurasian geopolitical space.<sup>3</sup> Russia's political leaders frequently allude to that reality. Vladimir Putin considers the CIS to assume major responsibility over issues such as "security, economic and humanitarian cooperation in Eurasia" (Putin, 2002). The extent to which Russia's links to the CIS are a crucial factor in the construction of Eurasia is understood when reading the following statement by Sergey Ivanov:

Russia and the CIS States are linked by common history, robust economic, cultural, and civilization bonds. [...] the good-neighborly relations with the CIS States [...] they represent the most important stability and security factor over the vast area of Eurasia. (Ivanov, 2004)

There is also a significant evolution in Russia's interaction with the post-Soviet space. The early years of the 2000s were characterized by Moscow's negligence of relations with these countries. Several events led to a reversal of this stance toward the mid-2000s. Chief among them are the NATO enlargement round in 2004, as well as the color revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), which Russia perceived as an outside intervention in its traditional sphere of interests.

More recently, the concept of Eurasia in Russian discourse evolved, and an institutional framework has been added as a new component in the construction of Eurasia.

<sup>3</sup> The three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which are now members of the EU and NATO, never participated in the CIS, and Georgia withdrew from the organization in 2008 following the war against Russia. It is sometimes argued that the CIS is merely an "empty shell" and inefficient as organization. However, it serves an important ideational purpose with regard to Russian discourses (Delcour, 2011, 35).

The architect behind this new conception of the Eurasian space is Vladimir Putin, who promoted the idea of a Eurasian Union, a new integration project for the region, in an article published in the *Izvestia* newspaper in October 2011. The principal idea behind this proposal is to build a

powerful supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world and serving as an efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region. [...] Alongside other key players and regional structures, such as the European Union, the United States, China and APEC, the Eurasian Union will help ensure global sustainable development. (Putin, 2011)

This initiative can also be seen as an attempt by Moscow to expand the definition of the geopolitical space of Eurasia to include an institutional framework. This complements and further consolidates the historical community in Eurasia centered on Russia (the Eurasian Economic Union will be treated in more detail below). This has become a priority in Putin's third presidential term, as he made clear in his inauguration speech:

These coming years will be crucial for shaping Russia's future in the decades to come. We must all understand that the life of our future generations and our prospects as a country and nation depend [...] on our determination in developing our vast expanses from the Baltic to the Pacific, and on our ability to become a leader and center of gravity for the whole of Eurasia. (Putin, 2012a)

The evolution of the use of Eurasia in Russian discourse reveals some interesting preliminary conclusions. Over the years, Eurasia moved from being an undefined vast geopolitical region, of which Russia is a central part, to a region which is dominated by Russia and in which Russia increasingly tries to institutionalize its dominance through a new regional setting. For instance, Putin proposed the establishment of a Eurasian Union (controlled by Russia) with the aim to consolidate the actors in the Eurasian region and to position the region as an important link between the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific regions. Russia considers its centrality within Eurasia as a precondition for its strong role in global politics, especially with the recent moves in favor of establishing Eurasia as a geopolitical region governed by legitimate institutional links and thus responding to a broader tendency in global politics toward more institutionalized regionalism and supranational organizations.

#### 4.2. Euro-Atlantic

Traditionally and historically, the Euro-Atlantic region and especially NATO, the principal security organization within this area, functioned as a counterpart to Russia and the Soviet Union. However, with the break-up of the Soviet Empire, the Euro-Atlantic space slowly acquired a new meaning. Some countries of the Eastern Bloc, including former Soviet republics, were admitted as new members to the institutions of this region, above all NATO but also the European Union (EU). For a long time, Russia remained an outsider. However, in the early 2000s, a new optic characterized Moscow's relationships with the EAR, leading to active attempts



by Russia to shape a new vision of this region. For instance, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov emphasized the need to reformulate the construction of the Euro-Atlantic space by calling for “new definition of Atlanticism that does not exclude Russia” (Lavrov, 2007). Later, Lavrov reasserted Russia’s position to this effect with reference to the changed circumstances derived from the dissolution of the Soviet Union: “Now, with the end of the Cold War, truly collective decisions are possible in the Euro-Atlantic area, which are unthinkable without the equal participation of Russia” (Lavrov, 2008).

While Russia long remained excluded from the political and institutional Euro-Atlantic community, Russia’s leaders continuously stressed Russia’s belonging to the historical and geographical European community. Before the East-West confrontation that characterized the Cold War, Russia, in its form as Russian empire, was a part of Europe and the European concert of powers. According to Putin, this did not change in the meantime, as he made clear when addressing the Russian Federal Assembly in 2005: “Above all else Russia was, is and will, of course, be a major European power” (Putin, 2005). Hence, Russia’s construction of the EAR is closely linked to Russia’s approach to Europe and the long historical relationship that unites them. As such, Russia’s Euro-Atlantic policy is an extension of its European identity. According to the official FPC of 2008: “The main objective of the Russian foreign policy on the European track is to create a truly open, democratic system of regional collective security and cooperation ensuring the unity of the Euro-Atlantic region, from Vancouver to Vladivostok” (Russian Federation, 2008). It is based on its assumed European identity that Moscow confers meaning upon the Euro-Atlantic geopolitical space.

Contrary to its position at the center of Eurasia, Russia cannot claim a similarly dominant role in the Euro-Atlantic region. The formulation of Russia’s membership in the EAR rests on a different discourse. Russian debates about the EAR thus almost exclusively focus on how to form an understanding between the dominant forces in the region, as Lavrov stated in 2007: “It wouldn’t hurt the part of the world customarily known as the Euro-Atlantic region to have a triple understanding – between the US, Russia and the European Union” (Lavrov, 2007). This quote is interesting in that it reveals Russia’s conception of the EAR as a region dominated by a handful of powerful actors. It thus seems that the construction of the Euro-Atlantic community is based on Moscow’s general reading of global politics as a system dominated by a small number of great powers each defending their pragmatic interests. The evolution of this discourse can also be seen in light of the complicated relationship between Russia and the West. Whereas Russia sought deeper integration with the West, especially after 9/11, until about 2003/2004 (Iraq war), the continued NATO enlargement estranged Russia and demonstrated to Moscow that it had to find its place in the EAR outside the boundaries of these institutions.

Thus, Russia’s leaders promoted their country as one of three poles in the Euro-Atlantic power structure and an active supplier of public goods. This implies a reformulation of Russian discourses around the themes of security and stability and the construction of the Euro-Atlantic as

a security community. For instance, Dmitry Medvedev during his tenure as President drafted a proposal for a pan-European security treaty, with the aim to form a more comprehensive security regime for the entire region.<sup>4</sup> In so doing, Russia’s policy-makers shaped their own understanding and interpretation of the region’s importance. By taking the initiative, Moscow attempts to dominate the formulation of the Euro-Atlantic region’s *raison d’être* and shape a new discourse:

The Euro-Atlantic vision today needs a positive agenda. [...] [A new European security treaty] should consolidate the Euro-Atlantic region as a whole on the basis of uniform rules of the game. And it should ensure in stable and legally binding form our common security guarantees for many years to come. (Medvedev, 2008)

The proposal to establish a new and inclusive security structure aims at replacing the traditional Euro-Atlantic structures and organizations such as NATO. Indeed, Lavrov argues that the main problem with the current system is “NATO-centrism, which by definition negates the creation of a truly universal mechanism of collective security in the Euro-Atlantic area” (Lavrov, 2008).

This new Russian proposal thus basically was a call to abandon the existing regional structures which exclude Russia or to reconstruct the region to include Russia. Hence, since the end of the Cold War, Moscow’s discourse continuously evolved in the direction of forming a new understanding of the Euro-Atlantic geopolitical space which includes Russia as one of the dominant actors. The purported shift from outsider to insider went alongside efforts to appropriate the sovereignty with regard to the definition of the Euro-Atlantic space.

#### 4.3. Asia-Pacific

In recent years, the Asia-Pacific region (APR) emerged as one of the major theatres in global politics. In contrast to the continent of Asia, the Asia-Pacific makes reference to the global and inclusive nature of the region beyond purely Asian countries. As such the US is a part of the Asia-Pacific, as is Russia, despite their lack of an Asian identity.<sup>5</sup> Russia, however, can claim that it is Asian by nature of its geography and the fact that two-thirds of its territory lie in Asia. Yet, Russia’s historical orientation as a country was toward the West and Europe. The distinction between Asia and the Asia-Pacific is crucial and part and parcel of Russia’s construction of this space. While the term Asia clearly has strong identity-related and historical connotations, the term Asia-Pacific has a pragmatic meaning. The APR in Russian discourse thus primarily refers to issues like economic development and security cooperation. In general, it is interesting to observe the change in tone.

In the 2008 FPC, the Asia-Pacific space is constructed within the context of Russia’s multi-vector foreign policy

<sup>4</sup> The full text of the draft European security treaty is available at <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/275>, accessed 26 November 2013.

<sup>5</sup> According to Salin, Russia is not considered to be Asian by most Asian countries. However, it can very well be considered a Pacific nation, just like the US (Salin, 2012).

and Russia's "belonging to this dynamically developing region of the world" (Russian Federation, 2008). However, one presidential term and one FPC later, the language became more assertive. Moscow affirmed its 'membership' in the geopolitical space of the Asia-Pacific: "Strengthening Russia's presence in the Asia-Pacific region (APR) is becoming increasingly important since Russia is an integral part of this fastest-developing geopolitical zone" (Russian Federation, 2013). Russia attempted to diversify its foreign and economic relations which thus far were mostly oriented toward the EAR. In addition, this change in attitude and Russia's 'Asia pivot' is in accordance with the globally perceived shift of power to the East. In this context, Russia, still nurturing the ambition to re-establish the country's status as one of the principal global great powers, cannot be absent from the Asia-Pacific.

Another aspect of the meaning of the Asia-Pacific for Russia is related to domestic considerations. Thereby, geographical proximity is used to establish strong links between the development of the APR and Russia's own development. The development of Siberia and the Russian Far East is thus directly related to the economic potential of the Asia-Pacific:

The Asia-Pacific region is becoming the most dynamic center of world economic development and our foreign policy line on deepening relations with APR should be closely tied up with domestic tasks, with the promotion of potential Russian interests towards using these ties to further develop the economy of Siberia and the Far East. (Putin, 2004)

Moscow thus makes clear that the welfare of its eastern regions is inseparable from the dynamics of the Asia-Pacific. By extension, the meaning of this geopolitical space is constructed around this economic and commercial component. According to Vladimir Putin,

in the 21st century, the vector of Russia's development will be the development of the East. Siberia and the Far East represent our enormous potential. And now we must realise our potential. We have the opportunity to assume a worthy place in the Asia-Pacific region, the most dynamic region in the world. (Putin, 2012b)

Hence, the APR is characterized as a land of opportunities and "Russia's integration into the Asian-Pacific economic space is of utmost importance" (Medvedev, 2010). In addition to fostering the development of the Russian Far East, the security predicament plays an important role, since peace and stability in the region are equally needed to provide a fertile environment in which economic cooperation may take place.

Over the years, Russia has evolved from being a passive member of the APR to an active participant. The discourse of Russia's leaders put more emphasis on Russia's membership in the Asia-Pacific space and not merely the affirmation of pragmatic interests. This also means that Russia's role is characterized differently; Russia no longer purely benefits from the Asia-Pacific's dynamism for its own development, but it actively contributes to it.

In accordance with the 'rise of the East', Russia adjusted its policy and interests. Through discourse, Russia's

belonging to the region and participation in regional matters is justified. However, this justification is based on a geographical reading and Russia's contiguity with the APR. This demonstrates that Russian interests in the APR are of a pragmatic nature in terms of keeping its position as a great power. It is in this context that we have to understand Russian efforts to integrate regional organization in the APR, such as ASEAN and APEC, whose summit Russia hosted for the first time in 2012 in Vladivostok.

## 5. The impact of the Ukraine crisis

Vladimir Putin returned to the Russian presidency for a third term in 2012. With regard to foreign policy, two major issues can be highlighted: the Ukraine Crisis and annexation of Crimea and the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). While these two issues evolved in parallel, there is a significant overlap in terms of their geopolitical implications. The EEU project was already in the pipeline well before the Ukraine crisis; however, the idea of a wider Eurasian integration reached a new quality following the events in Ukraine. In general, the Ukraine crisis and its repercussions for Russia's relations with the West, have an impact on Russia's geopolitical vision. The following section will analyze this in more detail.

While the idea of the EEU had been in the pipeline since Putin first outlined it in his *Izvestia* article in 2011, the agreement between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan for its implementation was signed on 29 May 2014. Armenia decided to become a member on 9 October and the EEU finally came into effect on 1 January 2015.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, the Ukraine crisis was in full swing. The crisis started in November 2013, when the Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich suddenly withdrew from the planned signing of an association agreement with the EU. Since then, events unfolded quickly, with the ousting of the Yanukovich government, the annexation of Crimea by Russia,<sup>7</sup> the election of a new government under the leadership of President Petro Poroshenko, the formation of pro-Russian groups that took to arms in Eastern Ukraine leading to the establishment of the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics and the increasingly brutal and large-scale military fighting between the Ukrainian military and the Russian-backed separatist fighters (Wilson, 2014). Attempts at conflict resolution so far failed. The conflict parties, under mediation from the

<sup>6</sup> See Popescu (2014) for a detailed discussion of the Eurasian Union project.

<sup>7</sup> Russia does not agree with labeling this an annexation, but insists on referring to the right of self-determination as enshrined in international law. In an interview with Western media, Putin replied to a question whether Russian troops annexed Crimea as follows: "It's a delusion that Russian troops annexed Crimea". He went on to state that Crimea joining the Russia Federation was compliant with international law: "Russian troops were in Crimea under the international treaty on the deployment of the Russian military base. It's true that Russian troops helped Crimeans hold a referendum on their (a) independence and (b) desire to join the Russian Federation. No one can prevent these people from exercising a right that is stipulated in Article 1 of the UN Charter, the right of nations to self-determination" (Putin, 2014b). However, Allison argues that this argumentation and Russia's legal rhetoric with regard to its actions in Crimea, and Ukraine in general, are seriously flawed (Allison, 2014, 1258–1268).

OSCE, signed the Minsk Protocol in September 2014 with the aim to establish a ceasefire. After the ceasefire broke down only months later, a second agreement, 'Minsk II', aiming to revive the previous one, was brokered in February 2015 by leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany. Nevertheless, fighting between the Ukrainian army and the separatists in the East continues to this day. So far, the UN estimates that more than 6500 people died during the conflict and more than 1,300,000 have been internally displaced and over 900,000 people sought asylum in neighboring countries (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2015). However, resolution of the conflict still seems to be far away. As a result of the crisis and Russia's intervention in Ukraine (above all the annexation of Crimea), the EU and US applied sanctions against a list of Russian individuals, officials and businesses, to which Moscow replied with countersanctions blocking agricultural imports from these countries.<sup>8</sup> The conflict thus attained a global level with far-reaching repercussions. In the following part, this article will reflect upon the implications of these events for the traditional geopolitical outlook in Russian foreign policy.

### 5.1. The geopolitical conditions of the Ukraine crisis

Many observers in Europe have asked how we arrived at the situation of war in Europe again, after what seemed to be a peaceful end of the Cold War. For many, the principal cause of the Ukraine crisis is to be found in geopolitics. Be it Russia's quest to control the territory beyond its borders (its 'near abroad') or the perceived competition between the EU and Russia over the countries in Europe's East and between Russia and the US globally. According to Sakwa, a number of issues have created the conditions leading to the Ukraine crisis: "The persistent delegitimation of Russia's security concerns, the anti-Russianism of the new NATO members, the failure to overcome the asymmetries in the Cold War settlement, the consolidation of a monological Wider European agenda of EU enlargement and its effective merger with the Atlantic security system, and the dismissal of Russian and other ideas for Greater European unity" (Sakwa, 2015, p. 48). From this debatable viewpoint, Moscow's actions in Ukraine were thus reactive rather than proactive. With regard to the geopolitical imagination outlined above, two issues are particularly important. First, NATO enlargement and, second, competition between Russia and the EU over diverging views of how Europe should be organized. As Putin argued in his speech in Sevastopol, following the annexation of Crimea, the West's actions in Ukraine, already before the crisis (such as the color revolutions and NATO membership promise to Georgia and Ukraine) were offensive: "We understand what is happening; we understand that these actions were aimed against Ukraine and Russia and against Eurasian integration. And

all this while Russia strived to engage in dialogue with our colleagues in the West" (Putin, 2014a).

The relationship between Russia and NATO is a complicated one. Russia's negative perceptions of NATO enlargement, with the accession of former Warsaw pact members and Soviet republics to the alliance, played a role in the way in which Russia's geopolitical imagination developed and also influenced Moscow's actions in Ukraine. As the realist scholar Mearsheimer argued, NATO enlargement is "the taproot of the trouble" and the Ukraine crisis thus the West's fault (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 77). At the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, Ukraine (and Georgia) were promised NATO membership in the future. While neither of the two countries was offered a Membership Action Plan, the formal step toward NATO accession, Moscow saw this as a step too far and was determined to prevent such a possibility. The five-day war Russia fought in August 2008 with Georgia can be seen in this light. It was Moscow's attempt to make sure that Georgia will not be able to become a NATO member in the near future (Dyomkin, 2011). With this in mind, Putin's statement during the speech in Sevastopol, celebrating the integration of Crimea into Russia, speaks clearly:

Let me note too that we have already heard declarations from Kiev about Ukraine soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO's navy would be right there in this city of Russia's military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia. (Putin, 2014a)

Hence, as Sakwa argues, while NATO enlargement was considered (by both existing and new members) to be the condition for a peaceful and united Europe, it left Russia outside and treated it like a loser of the Cold War. However, when Russia became more powerful again and affirmed its status as part of the European security architecture, the clash with NATO was unavoidable (Sakwa, 2015, p. 46).<sup>9</sup> The geopolitical logic underlying the Ukraine crisis, however, goes one step further because it not only involved NATO enlargement, but also the general European security architecture and contradicting visions of Europe's development.

For years, Russia promoted the idea of a 'Greater Europe', a space ranging from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast – from Lisbon to Vladivostok – as a new form of cooperation between Russia and the EU and deeper integration on the continent (Menkiszak, 2013). However, this idea fell on deaf ears since the EU was pursuing its own idea of a 'Wider Europe'. As a result, these two visions increasingly clashed with each other (Sakwa, 2015, p. 26). Indeed, as also others have argued, the EU and its attempts to draw the former

<sup>8</sup> For three recent book-length studies of the Ukraine crisis, see Wilson (2014), Menon and Rumer (2015), Sakwa (2015). For a complete chronological overview see the website 'The Ukraine Crisis Timeline' by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), available at <http://csis.org/ukraine/index.htm> (last accessed on 28 June 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Putin's statement when speaking to students in St. Petersburg illustrates this point neatly: "who is doing the fighting [in Ukraine] in reality? [...] a substantial part of those doing the fighting come from the so-called volunteer nationalist battalions. Essentially, this is not an army but is a foreign legion, in this particular case, a NATO foreign legion, which is not pursuing Ukraine's national interests of course. They have completely different goals, related to achieving their geopolitical aim of containing Russia" (Putin, 2015a).



Soviet republics closer to its orbit were looked upon by Moscow with increasing suspicion (Götz, 2015, p. 4). Foreign Minister Lavrov made this very clear in his speech at the Munich Security Forum in 2015:

There is a pinnacle in the course pursued by our western colleagues in the past quarter of a century on preserving their domination in world affairs by all possible means, on seizing the geopolitical space in Europe. They demanded of the CIS countries – our closest neighbours, connected with us by centuries economically, historically, culturally and even in terms of family ties – that they make a choice: “either with the West, or against the West.” [...] The EU chose a path of confrontation over the development of mutually beneficial interaction mechanisms. (Lavrov, 2015a)

The principal initiative developed by EU to engage some of the former Soviet republics was the Eastern Partnership. Developed in 2009, this program was considered by Russia to be an infringement of its sphere of influence and an attempt to draw its neighbors away from Moscow. Hence, when Russia started to formulate its Eurasian integration project and implemented the EEU, a geopolitical confrontation with the EU began (Sakwa, 2015, p. 41). This is relevant for our discussion of the Ukraine crisis and is echoed in a statement by Foreign Minister Lavrov:

The EU Eastern Partnership programme was also designed to expand the West-controlled geopolitical space to the east. [...] There is a policy to confront the CIS countries with a hard, absolutely contrived and artificial choice – either you are with the EU or with Russia. It was the use of this approach to Ukraine that pushed that country [...] to a profound internal political crisis. (Lavrov, 2014c)

Russia thus increasingly saw the EU's initiatives in the countries of the former Soviet Union as both a threat to its national interests and to its security. It singlehandedly blamed the West, and above all the EU, for pushing the limits too far and for engaging in geopolitical competition, ultimately leading to the crisis in Ukraine. At the same time, Götz argues that Russia exhibited a similar behavior in that it “is engaged in a geopolitical offensive, extending beyond Ukraine, with the aim to promote or consolidate its regional primacy” (Götz, 2015, p. 8). Hence, NATO enlargement and the exclusive European security system, which was rejected by Russia, were major causes for the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis. The trigger, however, was the planned signing of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November 2013 (Walker, 2015).

## 5.2. Failed integration into the Euro-Atlantic space

The crisis in Ukraine accentuated Russia's perception of the West and the increasingly negative view of the EAR. As a result, Russian foreign policy discourse on the EAR evolved significantly. While Russia previously spoke of the West – the EU and US in particular – as partners, it now lambasts them for excluding Russia. The current crisis in Ukraine and the powerful Western reaction with economic sanctions have demonstrated to Russia that the US and the EU are willing

to shut Russia out from the multipolar world order and instead aim to maintain the unipolar order under US leadership. As Lavrov stated during his speech at the UN general assembly:

The situation there has revealed the remaining deep-rooted systemic flaws of the existing architecture in the Euro-Atlantic area. The West has embarked upon a course towards “the vertical structuring of humanity” tailored to its own hardly inoffensive standards. After they declared victory in the Cold War and the “end of history,” the US and the EU opted for expanding the geopolitical area under their control without taking into account the balance of legitimate interests of all the people of Europe. (Lavrov, 2014b)

While Russia was seeking cooperative relations, its “western partners have promoted their own agenda, ignoring Russia's interests in many points, expanded NATO, and generally attempted to move the geopolitical space under their control directly to the Russian borders” (Lavrov, 2014a). Permeating these statements is a clear understanding that this is a result of US policies and that the EU actually only follows the US' lead. Hence, Russia finds itself in competition with the US over Europe, which traditionally is one of Russia's main partners. This has been expressed clearly in a number of statements: “Regarding the Ukraine crisis, the US goal is to prevent Russia and the EU from deepening their partnership. [...] I have no doubts whatsoever that this is its strategic goal” (Lavrov, 2015b). This is an important point since it demonstrates that Russia's discourse is more nuanced when it comes to the EU. For instance, the following statement by Lavrov indicated that Russia sees the United States as its primary adversary and the EU still as a partner:

The course to restriction of Russia's possibilities is led not by European powers, but by the United States. Many analysts in Russia, the European Union and in the United States underline that the United States do not want to allow the potentials of Russia and the EU to combine, guided primarily by the objective of keeping their global leadership. (Lavrov, 2014a)

The discourse with regard to the Euro-Atlantic space thus took a new turn. In this regard, the competition over Ukraine became a competition over Russia's place in Europe. As Lavrov argued, “the United States is interested not in the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Ukraine, but in using this country as an irritant in the relations between Russia and Europe and as an excuse to put Russia in its place” (Lavrov, 2014c). Not only does this statement allude to Russia's interest in maintaining cooperative relations with Europe, it also demonstrates that Ukraine acts as an important means through which Russia remains influential in Europe.

In the end, the result of Russia's engagement with the EAR was failed integration. The crisis over Ukraine is just the final nail in the coffin of Russia's attempt to become a full-fledged member of the Euro-Atlantic space. However, the statements above indicate an important distinction. Even though Russia currently considers the EU a geopolitical adversary when it comes to the post-Soviet space, the logic of a cooperative relationship has not yet been abandoned.

The discussion below will demonstrate that Russia has not yet fully abandoned its idea of ‘Greater Europe’ – “a common space for economic and humanitarian cooperation that would spread from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean – [...] a single space from Lisbon to Vladivostok” (Putin, 2014c). In addition, Moscow’s discourse on Eurasian integration has become more varied.

### 5.3. The new dimension of Eurasian integration

This brings us to the Eurasian Economic Union. There are two dimensions to this project. First, while integration processes in the post-Soviet space have existed before, it demonstrates the importance of Russia’s “pivot to Eurasia” as a major characteristic of Putin’s third presidency (Liik, 2014). Second, the EEU has always been framed as a cooperative project that could one day lead to closer integration within what Russia sees as ‘Greater Europe’. Indeed, when it comes to the EEU, Russia’s leaders put a strong emphasis on the open nature of the project:

As we promote the Eurasian integration project, we are in no way trying to separate ourselves from the rest of the world; we are ready to consider prospects for creating free trade zones both with individual states and with regional associations and unions, primarily the European Union, of course. (Putin, 2014c)

This insistence on cooperation with the EU is very strong and while Putin laments the fact that the EU refuses to acknowledge the EEU and enter into cooperation with it, he does not tire to claim that the EEU and the EU should eventually work together closely. Here, the idea of Greater Europe comes back into play since, ideally, cooperation between the EU and EEU would lead to its realization. Even amidst the crisis in Ukraine, in October 2014, Foreign Minister Lavrov reiterated this aim:

We still believe that the strategic goal of Russia-EU cooperation should be gradual development of a common economic and cultural space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast based on a system of indivisible security where no country would strengthen its security at the expense of the others. We stand for developing cooperation between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) [...]. In other words, we stand for a convergence of integration processes. (Lavrov, 2014c)

The essence of this idea should eventually lead to what Lavrov calls “the integration of integrations” (Lavrov, 2014d), a convergence of European and Eurasian integration projects. However, and contrary to what the Russian leadership hoped for, this logic of cooperation was not implemented. Instead, it led to what Charap and Troitskiy call the “integration dilemma” in which “one state perceives as a threat to its own security or prosperity its neighbours’ integration into military alliances or economic groupings that are closed to it” (Charap & Troitskiy, 2013, p. 50). As a result of this integration dilemma, which played out in the Ukraine crisis, the idea of a Greater Europe, uniting Russia with the EU, is no longer plausible. The relationship between Russia and the West remained fraught with competition which took serious economic (sanctions) and discursive (propaganda

war) turns. As a result, fostering the development of the EEU became the new strategic goal, which would help overcome Russia’s isolated position within Europe and the EAR.

Russian discourse evolved, leading to the EEU being depicted as one of the foundations for a strong Russia in global politics, because it gives Russia more importance vis-à-vis its neighbors in the West (EU) but also in the East (Trenin, 2014, pp. 9–10). In the light of the Ukraine crisis, the following statement which Putin made during the 2013 Valdai discussion club meeting seems to be relevant today:

The Eurasian Union is a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world. Eurasian integration is a chance for the entire post-Soviet space to become an independent centre for global development, rather than remaining on the outskirts of Europe and Asia. (Putin, 2013)

Coming back to the earlier question of how Russia’s geopolitical outlook changed due to the implementation of the EEU and the events in Ukraine, we can observe that Eurasia remained at the center of Russian foreign policy. However, the institutionalization of Eurasian integration with the implementation of the EEU and Russian attempts to attract new members, added a new dimension. As the locomotive of its own Eurasian integration project, Russia cemented its place as a pole in the multipolar order.

Since Russia’s leaders continuously emphasized the open nature of the EEU project, its implementation did not lead to an estrangement between Russia and the APR. Similarly, the negative repercussions of the Ukraine crisis seemed to be confined to the EAR and Europe. However, this is not to say that it did not have an impact. On the contrary, as the following statement from Lavrov indicates, the Ukraine crisis, and the subsequent sanctions imposed on Russia by the US and the EU, helped Russia foster closer ties with the APR: “the recent restrictive measures have provided an impetus for more actively developing relations with our partners in the East, although we would rather do this simultaneously with developing our traditional cooperation with the West than instead of it” (Lavrov, 2014c). The emphasis on the potential of the SCO, which is seen as a tool that could help Russia develop stronger ties with its eastern neighbors, was more prominent. In addition, the SCO of course also provides important links to China, which became a strong partner for Russia, a development that was reinforced by the events in and around Ukraine.

Hence, in May 2014, Russia signed a \$400 billion gas deal with China that would supply the latter with Russian gas over 30 years. While this deal had important symbolic value, the actual economic value remains contested, since the price China is paying is below the price in Europe. Nevertheless, Russia and China have been moving closer amid the crisis with the West. On the eve of Russia’s Victory Day celebrations on 8 May, the Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin signed a number of bilateral agreements. Chief among them was a joint declaration on cooperation in coordinating the development of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt. Using very similar language as in previous statements about the potential for the EEU to integrate with the EU, Putin stated the goal of

this new cooperation with the Chinese project as follows: “Essentially, we seek ultimately to reach a new level of partnership that will create a common economic space across the entire Eurasian continent” (Putin, 2015b).

Hence, in addition of being an important partner for Russia in the SCO, as well as a fellow great power in the multipolar world order, Russia and China now seemed to have elevated their relations to the next level. This also demonstrates Russia’s willingness to adapt its geopolitical outlook. In so doing, its new integration project, the EEU, was rebranded as a means to foster stronger ties with the SCO and the APR in general. The logic thus changed: while previously the emphasis of the EEU was on cooperation with the EU, eventually leading to ‘Greater Europe’, the EEU now stands for the development of the entire Eurasian region. As Trenin pointedly puts it, “in lieu of a Greater Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok, a Greater Asia from Shanghai to St. Petersburg is in the making” (Trenin, 2015, p. 11).

## 6. Conclusion

Traditionally, Russia sees itself as a member of three geopolitical spaces: Eurasia, the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific. Russia’s political leaders perceive Russia to have more than one, or at least a flexible identity. Each of these spaces carries several attributes and characterizations and occupies a particular role in Russia’s perception of its own position in global affairs. The brief discussion about the importance of status considerations in Russian foreign policy has demonstrated that Russia strives to be recognized as a great power. Russian membership in the three geopolitical spaces has a dialectical importance with regard to this Great Power status. Because Russia is a “member” of each of these regions it is a great power and as a great power, it is automatically part or has interests in each of these regions. Furthermore, Russian membership in these geopolitical spaces is at the same time instrumental to Moscow’s foreign policy with regard to its quest for great power status as well as constitutive with regard to Russia’s geopolitical outlook and the perception of its place in the international system.

After a preliminary analysis of the implications of the Ukraine crisis, it can be concluded that Russia’s geopolitical vision experienced a considerable shift. Before the Ukraine crisis, Russia considered itself to be a “full member” of the three geopolitical spaces Eurasia, Euro-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific. The events in Ukraine, which unfolded throughout the year 2014 and are still ongoing, as well as their global repercussions, had an impact on Russian geopolitical thinking. From the point of view of the Russian leadership, the Ukraine crisis demonstrated that Moscow cannot be part of the EAR in its current form. The sense of rejection and the failed attempts at integration were too heavy a burden. Russia’s leaders consider their country to be one of the main powers in a multipolar international system and refuse to be pushed outside of this system. The Ukraine crisis brought to light that the traditional and decades-long rivalry with the US is still simmering and the relationship between the US and Russia is in deadlock. Russia’s membership in the Euro-Atlantic space thus more and more resembled a farce.

This sentiment of rejection and exclusion, coupled with the Ukraine crisis, went hand in hand with Russia’s new Eurasian discourse and the expansion of Eurasian integration. Hence, Russia’s focus on Eurasia, which represents Russia’s “traditional position as a Eurasian power sitting between the East and the West” and the turn to the East and China became more important (Trenin, 2015, p. 3). This led to Moscow’s departure from its previous stance of wanting to be an equal member of the EAR. Indeed, while Russia still strives for Great Power status, Moscow no longer feels the need to be a member of each of the three geopolitical spaces. Instead, it needs its own integration project, ideally with global reach, which explains the stark focus on the Eurasian Economic Union. What is more, the turn to the East and to China in particular, provided the EEU with a new dimension for development. As such it can be argued that Russia’s vision of Eurasia experience a slight shift from ‘EURasia’ to ‘eurASIA’.

The discussion and the main arguments in Russia’s construction of the three geopolitical spaces, as well as the impact of the Ukraine crisis on this traditional thinking are summarized in Table 1.

Discourses by political leaders in the realm of foreign policy fulfill a particular function of communicating the country’s interests and priorities, while at the same time detailing the elite’s worldview. They also serve to justify certain policies and to position the country on the global political map according to the policy-makers’ perception of that map. As such, discourses reflect the perceived role of a country in international affairs. Russia’s place in the international order has significantly changed, not only due to its actions in Ukraine, but also due to its discursive practice of carving out a new place for the country. This article has demonstrated that Russia’s elite actively formulated their country’s central position in the three ‘geopolitical spaces’ up until the Ukraine crisis. Thereafter, Moscow continued to claim a dominant role in current international affairs, while its regional geopolitical outlook become more focused on Eurasia and the potential of the EEU as an integrator with other organizations and countries.

The question of the long-term implications of the Ukraine crisis on Russia’s geopolitical imagination remains. Equally, drawing conclusions on what needs to be done for the restoration of constructive relations between Brussels, Moscow and Washington remains difficult. However, in light of the previous discussion, not all hope is lost. Russia’s turn to the East, while providing many opportunities and benefits, does not represent a complete rejection of relations with the West. Both in terms of economic cooperation as well as historical and cultural links, Russia is bound to interact with the US and the EU. This is also reflected in a large number of discourses by Russia’s leaders. What is more, Russia consistently stressed that the EEU is an open project with the aim to integrate the wider Eurasian region and to create a common space encompassing the entire continent. This offer still stands. If both conflict parties manage to rebuild some of the lost trust and to break out of the logic of zero-sum competition, stronger links between the different integration models could eventually lead to a better common understanding and a new logic of cooperation.

**Table 1**  
Russia's construction of geopolitical spaces and the impact of the Ukraine crisis.

	Eurasia	Euro-Atlantic	Asia-Pacific
Issues	Historical community; economic, political and institutional integration; regional stability under Russian leadership and dominance	End to East–West conflict; common economic space and security architecture under joint Russian, EU and US leadership;	Economic potential and dynamism; development and modernization of Siberia and Russian Far East, security; relations with China
Discourse	Eurasia does not exist without Russia because Russia is linked politically, geographically, culturally, economically and historically with Eurasia	Russia always was a European power with a European identity (among others) engaged in European affairs and thus is a part of the Euro-Atlantic	Russia is part of Asia because two-thirds of its territory lie there and it has a Pacific coast, mutually beneficial economic relations
Evolution	Early 2000s: further integration with CIS to guarantee security. 2007 onward: establishment of new institutional links, i.e. Customs Union, EurAsEC; increasing pressure on neighboring countries. 2011 onward: promotion of the Eurasian Union; new quality of Eurasian integration	Early 2000s: Discourse focused on Europe and European identity; cooperation with US. 2007 onwards: proposal of common security architecture in the EAR through pan-European security treaty from Vancouver to Vladivostok. 2011 onward: common economic and humanitarian space from Lisbon to Vladivostok	Early 2000s: geographical proximity with Asia has benefits for Russia and development of Russian Far East. 2008 onward: Russia as integral part of the APR with security and economy main themes; focus on integration with regional organizations. 2011 onward: Russia and EEU as link between East and West
Impact of Ukraine Crisis	Eurasia is the center of Russian attention; Economic integration is key, and the EEU plays a crucial role, especially in Russia's quest for great power status; EEU should foster cooperation with other integration initiatives; EEU is considered a large-scale integration project, helping Russia to integrate with Asia following its "rejection" by the West.	EAR in its previous form no longer exists; the US and the West are striving for unipolarity, while EU/Europe is just a puppet of US interests; Russia's attempt at integration failed; EAR increasingly as a zone of competition between Russia and the West, and the EU and EEU; Logic of competition prevails, yet Russia remains open to cooperation with West.	Stronger cooperation with APR and China in particular is important for trade and for balancing the multipolar system; Russia strives for deeper integration through the EEU; SCO remains important in consolidating APR and increasing economic and security cooperation.

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